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NEWS RELEASE

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State, Industry Fix Septic Tank Problems for Low Income Families

(Santa Fe, NM) – The New Mexico Environment Department’s (NMED) Liquid Waste Program and the Professional Onsite Wastewater Reuse Association of New Mexico (POWRA-NM) are collaborating to help a low-income household in northern New Mexico fix their faulty septic system. The husband and wife, both senior citizens struggling to make ends meet on Social Security benefits, could not afford to replace their aging and failed septic system. The local water utility had scheduled to disconnect their water service due to concerns about the proximity of surfacing sewage to a water distribution line.

POWRA-NM is going to donate equipment, supplies and manpower to complete the replacement of the septic system. NMED has issued a permit for construction, will provide additional labor, and will conduct a final inspection. Construction work will take place on March 29, 2012.

Ralph Baker, POWRA-NM President, said, “This is our way of thanking the twenty-five percent of New Mexico’s population who utilize onsite wastewater systems and provide us with work.”

NMED Secretary Dave Martin praised POWRA-NM and noted, “The fact that an organization composed of small businesses has, in these tough economic times, dug into their own pockets to help a senior couple eliminate a public health hazard is a remarkable act of kindness and generosity.”

The Office of the Natural Resource Trustee (ONRT) and NMED have an ongoing project to assist indigent households within the Middle Rio Grande Basin eliminate illegal cesspools or substandard household septic systems that threaten water quality and public health. ONRT has funded the project with \$230,000 from natural resource damage settlements from hazardous substance contamination sites. NMED administers the project by recruiting and screening indigent households, and permitting, overseeing and inspecting the work done by a licensed construction contractor. To date, 48 indigent households have had modern septic systems installed on their property, or have been connected to public sewer.

The 2009 N.M. Legislature created the Liquid Waste Disposal System Assistance Fund in the state treasury to provide assistance to indigent households statewide. Unfortunately, money has not been available to appropriate into the fund since its creation. “We are hoping that the economy will recover soon, so that an appropriation can be made to the Liquid Waste Disposal System Assistance Fund,” Martin said. “There are poor people all over the state whose health and safety are threatened by substandard septic systems.”

More information on the NMED Indigent Liquid Waste Assistance Program is available on the Liquid Waste Program website at this location:

<http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/fod/LiquidWaste/documents/McQuillanindigentprogram.pdf>

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